

What are the Information Needs of Communities & Citizens? The main thing lacking is some kind of an interactive forum. By this I mean some place where citizens can engage in dialogue and the comments of the citizens can be publicly posted so everyone can follow along. Our best source of information is our local NPR radio station and electronic community bulletin boards. We also have some independently owned community magazines that come out quarterly; they usually have good feature articles that keep us posted on what is happening in our town and our region. Email is one of the best sources of information for local events. Many of us receive monthly email newsletters that update us on what is happening in various sectors in the local community. An example is sustainability; this is a "hot topic" here and the local groups are good about getting out information through emails or the bimonthly newsletter put out by the Ashland Co-op. The Co-op also offers free Monday night lectures on various topics of interest in the community. !

Friends of the Library also bring in guest speakers and underwrite the costs of free film nights and lectures. SOU (Southern Oregon University) also brings in national guest speakers on topics of interest; recently they brought in a distinguished US historian to talk about the Presidency. We also have access to ESPN.

How is Commercial Media Serving Your Community?

Poorly. Our main local newspaper, the Medford Tribune, is owned by the Rupert Murdoch chain. Ditto for the local stations network affiliates. I don't have anything good to say about them. The kindest thing I can say is that they are mediocre. The best articles are picked up off the national wire services (like AP or the New York Times). The local stories tend to be poorly written, and are often incomplete. They present some of the information, but not all of it. I have heard many people say that the local meeting they attended, and the local meeting described in our local newspaper, are two entirely different meetings.

The Ashland Daily Tidings does a little bit better in reporting community news and information; but it's "thin." Most of the staff was let go when Murdoch took over the newspaper.

The editorial pages of the Tribune are a little more conservative than those of the Tidings. This is an accurate reflection of the interests of the communities. Ashland tends to be more progressive with an active citizenry. Medford is more "average" in its political views and citizen participation.

The local community access TV and the local internet stations are probably the best source of information about local affairs. NPR is the best all-around radio station for news; ditto for our local PBS station.

My biggest complaint about our commercial media is low level of intelligence exhibited in the speech and reporting patterns. I have a PhD in Communication. Believe me when I tell you that the speech

patterns, vocabulary, and general rhetorical style is poor. People use words and phrases that are grammatically incorrect. Sometimes they use slang and jargon. I am appalled. I find myself wondering who taught them their craft. There is lots of room for improvement just in the presentation of the information. Lack of meaningful content is a problem, but so is proper presentation.

To specifically answer your question: are we getting the kind of information we need from the commercial media, no. As long as 5 companies in the world own most of the media -- radio, TV, and print -- we are only going to hear what they want us to hear. Their agenda seems to be to keep us in fear and keep us ignorant. The only way to change this is to break up the conglomerates. Media consolidation, in my view, has resulted in the "dumbing down" of America. So much of what goes on commercially is like the "bread and circuses" of the Roman times. I am appalled. We cannot survive as a democracy with an ignorant and apathetic citizenry -- which is what we have now. Commercial media does NOT provide enough information on any topic. IT encourages shallow thinking and simplistic "answers." It panders to a 6th grade level of intelligence and education. We are better than this. If you look at the commercial media from the 1950's you see a media that EXPECTED its citizens t!

o engage in adult behaviors -- adult thinking and adult participation. This is not what I see today.

What is the State of Noncommercial, Nonprofit, and Public Media?

See my comments on the first two questions. I am happy to say that public media -- NPR and PBS -- are alive and well in our community. We are fortunate enough to have the local NPR radio and PBS TV studio located on the campus of Southern Oregon University. Candidates for political office are regularly interviewed on the radio and TV. Our NPR station also streams online at www.ijpr.org so we are able to give them input on the kinds of programs that we would like to see. They are quite responsive to the needs of the community. They are wonderful in terms of giving local groups Public Service Announcements; these PSA's are for all kinds of groups: civic, arts and music, local school performances, community activities and lectures, etc. I am pleased to be able to say that 82% of the money for our local stations comes from the public. WE have a spring and fall membership drive; folks are really good about pledging for membership and giving booster pledges or sometimes making pledges.

AS I stated earlier, we have several local community magazines that come out quarterly. OUR local Co-op publishes a bi-monthly newsletter and offers a free Monday night lecture series on topics of interest in the community. We have two electronic bulletin boards (e.g. Ashland Resource Center) that publish a weekly calendar of local events.

AS I stated previously, the public media is the ONLY media that provides indepth coverage of local

and national events. I am speaking here of NPR and PBS. The NRP station has an internet site; that attracts customers from all over the US. During a recent pledge drive for NPR, someone from Arkansas wired in a pledge over the Internet; he stated that our local NPR station was the best one he could find in his area! (Our station is located in Oregon.) If the NPR station were not available on the Internet, this man could not get the kind of news and entertainment that he wants. This one example alone should encourage the FCC to expand the public media - in both traditional and Internet forms.

Are local nonprofit news website competing with traditional media? Yes; see example in paragraph above. As I stated previously, the community access TV, the NPR and PBS stations, the Internet websites, and the electronic community bulletin boards are the most reliable source of information on community events of all kinds -- esp. children's events like nature programs at the local parks, visit by NASA at the local Science Works Museum, etc. NONE of these events would be mentioned on commercial TV; some might be mentioned on local commercial radio stations and in the weekly events calendar in the commercial newspaper. Most folks here depend on the alternative sources; they are more reliable and provide more detailed and complete information.

What is the Impact of the Internet and Mobile Information?

Re the impact of Internet: see my comments in the paragraphs above. The short answer is that it has a strong and positive impact in our community.

I am not so familiar with what goes on with mobile service. I have a pay-as-you go cell phone and use it infrequently. We do have several competing mobile services in our area. I know that many people use their iPhones to access the Web, send emails and text, etc. AS I stated earlier, our local NPR station does stream online. Someone with an iPhone or Blackberry should be able to access all their programs.

I do have high speed Internet broadband service through my DSL line. I also have wireless access, although I use that less often. I could not download many articles, educational programs, etc. that of interest to me WITHOUT the broadband access. The dial-up is just too slow; and it won't handle the volume of data -- especially graphics.

Yes, our local government is online. WE have coverage through ESPN and also through community access TV. Our local Chamber of Commerce is quite active; it runs a full website with links to many other business, schools, etc. Ashland is home to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF); this is one of only 5 regional theater companies. We gets lots of tourists in the summer. So OSF, the City of Ashland, and the Chamber of Commerce all have good website with links to each other. The City of Ashland is one of the few cities that owns and operates its own electric utility and fiber network. And yes, you can get onto the City's site and find information about upcoming meetings, events, etc.

Social networking is very important in Ashland. As I said, we have two local electronic bulletin boards. Everyone lists his/her events on these bulletin boards. It is the best way to get your message out to a large segment of the population. Both electronic bulletin boards also offer email service and RSS feeds. You can sign up to receive emails on topics of interest to you.

We are EXTREMELY FORTUNATE to have a large variety of information available to us here in Ashland. WE have enough diversity in our public, nonprofit, and Internet media to meet the needs of most of the population. Sadly, this is NOT the case in many areas. I believe the FCC needs to make sure that any community that wants to create this type of media diversity can do so. This cannot happen when conglomerates own the local media and the local airwaves. They have no interest in creating a literate and thoughtful population of citizen participants. Yet our democracy cannot thrive and survive without such a population.

PLEASE, give the air waves back to the public. And please listen to us when we tell you that we DO NOT want media consolidation. It is not working for anyone but the conglomerates.